

Mrs. Samantha's Christmas Gathering.

If there was one thing above another which seemed particularly attractive and desirable in the eyes of Miss Samantha Dawson, spinster, it was family gatherings. Perhaps the very fact of her own life being bare and colorless made them seem more beautiful than ever. She was thin, faded and forty; cheerless and alone. The past lay behind like an arid desert, and no bright star of hope illumined the future, toll and privation had been her lot in the past, and she had no reason to think it would be otherwise in the coming years; not a pleasant outlook "ruly for one whose heart could, under the proper influences, blossom like the rose, and spend its fragrance of generosity, pity and kindness upon all who come within its radius, but in the past, Miss Dawson's life was bare. In childhood she had been denied a mother's care, no merry, frolicsome brothers and sisters had grown up with her, side by side, and the reason for all this was apparent, for Miss Samantha was a foundling. Many years before she had been picked up on one of the principal thoroughfares of a large city, wandering aimlessly around, evidently terrified by the bustle and noise, for the tears were streaming from her eyes and the same forlorn expression on her face which had remained with her through all these years. She was placed by the authorities in an orphan's home and kept there until large enough to be bound to a widow, who taught her sewing, and with whom she remained, serving her faithfully until the day of her death. It was without any deep feeling of regret that Miss Samantha saw the widow shuffle off this mortal coil, for she was a hard and unsympathetic mistress who never missed a chance of upbraiding her and reminding her of her dependent position. With many qualms and inward quakings Miss Samantha went into business for herself. She rented a little room in a respectable tenement house, and hung out her modest sign, "Samantha Dawson; Fine Sewing by Hand or Machine." She also inserted an advertisement in one of the leading papers, which she hoped would bring her the much-needed patronage. It was with feelings of real satisfaction and pride that she viewed the sign when it was sent home. She stood it on the mantelpiece and looked at it, first in front, then from the side; then she passed rapidly by to see if it would attract the eye of pedestrians. It certainly was a pretty thing; quite a work of art; letters of silver on a black background; it seemed a pity to hang it out in the weather, and she wondered if it would be advisable to take it in at night. She really enjoyed the little thrill which passed through her at seeing her name for the first time in print. But, alas, the sign which appeared to her so alluring did not attract the crowd of customers she had hoped for, though she waited long and patiently, and the little leaves of hope began to wither on their stems, when late one afternoon there came a gentle knock at the door. Miss Samantha opened it with many heart flutterings. A beautiful, young, well-dressed lady confronted her, who smiled in a reassuring way at seeing Miss Samantha's trepidation. "Is this Miss Dawson, the seamstress?" said the lady. "No, thank you, I'll not come in, as my carriage is waiting below." "My dear, you are an advertisement in the Journal that you are an expert with the needle, and I have some fine sewing to be done at once, as I am going abroad the first of the year; so I came to see you personally to impress upon you the importance of having it done immediately, and I hope you will not take any time to accommodate me." "Indeed, I am not, madam," said Miss Samantha, honestly. "I'll be just too glad of the work, and I know I can please you. Leastways, I'll try my very best." "Then you may come to-morrow morning at 8 o'clock," said the lady. "Here is my card, the address is on the reverse side. And she swept away, leaving her behind her a faint perfume of violets. Miss Samantha could not really tell whether it was that or the sweet face of the lady which left such pleasing effect upon her. She took the card to the window and eagerly examined the address. "Mrs. J. Percival Carleton, 348 Clivedon Terrace." "Clivedon Terrace," ejaculated Miss Samantha; "why, that's where all the fine houses are. None but the very richest folks live there. Well, well, to think I've got work at last, and she said there was a good deal of it, too. I reckon I won't do any busy Christmas day after all." It was such an event to her that she set about getting her tea and toast with a glad heart, and before she knew it she was singing quite cheerily in a thin, highly pitched voice.

"Ye dwellers in the dust,
Awake, come forth and sing;
Sleep has your roset of winter been,
But bright shall be your spring."
She could scarcely sleep that night for thinking of her good fortune. The next morning she wended her way to Clivedon Terrace, starting early, for it was a long distance, and she never dreamed of treating herself to the luxury of a cable car, for she often observed to herself "every penny counts."

At last she reached the Terrace, the most fashionable quarter of the city. There were beautiful houses on each side, white with sparkling windows, myriads of diamonds in the winter sun, lay before her. She eagerly scanned each number. Some of the houses set so far back it was difficult to make them out. Here it was at last. No, that was 238. A few steps further yet. Ah, here it was. A handsome, gray stone dwelling, with an ample lawn, and a fine driveway. Its entrance guarded by two great stone lions crouching on each side of the large gate. Yes, indeed, thought Miss Samantha, nervously pulling her dingy little shawl more closely about her. "This is just the kind of a house I knew she'd live in." She passed the huge pillars which between the two rows of tall poplars which lined each side, and ascending the steps timidly rung the bell. A pert boy in livery opened the door, and partly closed it again when he saw little Miss Samantha, shrinking and shabby.

"What is it you want?" said he. "I've come to see Mrs. Carleton." "Mrs. Carleton?" said the boy. "Well, you should have went to the servants' entrance. What on earth do you mean by coming in here?" "I'll do so to-morrow, if you'll be kind enough to show me how to get to it," said Miss Samantha, weak with fright. "See that you do, then," said the boy, "but come in this way now, and I'll send word to the mistress." She entered the large hall, and, nervously seating herself, waited some time. At last a neat-looking maid servant appeared and announced that Mrs. Carleton was in the nursery and wanted her. She accompanied the girl upstairs to a large and cheerful room filled with every conceivable toy, with which to delight the heart of childhood.

Mrs. Carleton spoke kindly to her. "So you are here on time, Miss Dawson. I see I may depend upon you. I'll show you what work I have for you to do. A little child with long, golden curls lay upon a couch, and regarded her curiously, with beautiful mournful eyes. "What a pretty boy," said Miss Samantha. "Indeed, he is," answered Mrs. Carleton. "This is little Percival, our only child. I always call him baby, though he is nine years old." The boy arose as his mother spoke, and Miss Samantha's eyes filled with tears. Little Percival was a hunchback. "Ah, Miss Dawson," said the hunchback, quick to read the look of sympathy, "he is so happy and patient and good, and we are going to take him across the big ocean to see a famous doctor, and when he comes back we hope he will be well and straight and strong. Now, here is your work," and she brought out piles of white

goods, fine and sheer, and yards upon yards of dainty laces and embroideries. "These are to be washed for Percival, and must be done by hand and very neatly done. So try your best, Miss Dawson. You may see in here if you would like. It is bright and cheerful, and Percival likes to meet strangers. I think you will soon be friends." So saying, she left them. Miss Samantha sewed with a right good will day after day she spent with Percival in the nursery. They got along famously. She told him of the people who lived in the tenement house. The one-legged shoemaker who sang at his work. Old grandmother West, who wore two pair of spectacles, and who, winter and summer, kept the door open, "just for a bit of fresh air;" and of the two little orphans who sold papers and lived with Mrs. McMullen, the washerwoman. He was never tired of hearing of them. By and by she grew quite confidential, and he was much interested in her own lonely condition, and thought it strange she did not even know whether her mother was dead or alive. "Just think," said he. "You were found all alone in the streets when you were a little girl, and you've been lonely ever since. It's too bad." He thought a moment, and added, "This will not be a happy Christmas for you, will it?" No," said Miss Samantha, "I can't say it will, for, as I've often said before, I'm a mighty to crave for family gatherings, on festive occasions, and I never was at one in my life, and it seems like the older I get the more I long for 'em."

This seemed to make a deep impression on Percival, for he sat in silence quite a long time for him, as he was a great little talker. Just what his thoughts were, I cannot tell, but, presently, he said, "If you really want a family gathering so badly, why don't you have one?" "Why don't you, child," said Miss Samantha. "How you do talk. There's two reasons for it, and very good ones, too, they are." "What are they?" said Percival. "First, I haven't got the family, and second, I haven't got the money." "Well," said the child, "it really doesn't matter how you do it. I'll tell you. I'm just a little boy, and I have everything I can think of, and a great deal I do not think of, but I'm not selfish, for mamma says that would be wicked. But sometimes, maybe, you'll not think to a family of your own." "No, child, never, never," said Miss Samantha, with quite a touching sadness in her voice.

A day or two before Christmas she finished the work, and it was with feelings of much sorrow that she bade little Percival good-bye. He stood by eagerly as his mother paid her the well-earned money. Then he sprang forward and said, "Now, now, mamma, give it to me. Here is my Christmas present to you, Miss Samantha," and he placed in her hand a shining gold coin. Miss Samantha stood aghast at sight of it. Then she stammered, "O my dear little boy, I can't ever take it, I really can't. I don't deserve it." "Yes you do," said the child, "and I'll tell you what I want you to do with it. I want you to have a real family gathering on Christmas day. I told mamma how you always wanted to be in one, and how lonely you've always been, and she helped me plan it all, and you must invite the people you told me about to live in the house with you, and are too poor to have any Christmas. You know who they are—the one-legged shoemaker and Patsy Flynn and the two little orphans, and all the rest. Now, promise me you will do it, and sometime you must come and tell me all about it." "Yes, mamma," said the child, "I'll do it. Mrs. Carleton. 'He has set his heart upon it, and we never disappoint him.' 'I will, I will,' said poor Miss Dawson, tremulously. "Good-bless you. You are the very sweetest little boy I ever saw." At this point her feelings overcame her, and she hurried away. Down the long drive into the street she passed, fairly flitting along, so happy was she made by the first kind words and generous deed which had ever bestowed upon her.

The next day she called Mrs. McMullen and accepted the joyful news. They formed a partnership on the spot. She was to furnish the provisions, and Mrs. McMullen was to borrow all the dishes possible, and together they would produce the finest Christmas dinner ever recorded.

The invitations were delivered verbally and accepted likewise. The whole tenement was in a state of high glee over the coming festivities. The day before the grand affair Miss Samantha went to the little grocery around the corner to make a few last purchases. The proprietor, James Podgett, Esq., was always a very red-faced and one-eyed fellow, but he had apparently lost control, for as he said himself, "It looked like Sunday." "Well, well, Miss Dawson," said he, "so you are really going to have a Christmas gathering. That's right, that's right. I'll make bold to say it's a thing I've always looked upon with much favor, and have often thought I would like to take part in it, but I'm like yourself, alone in the world and never had the chance." This last remark touched Miss Samantha, actually to the heart. 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